

Indonesian government revokes pulp mill's operating license

Churches in North Sumatra celebrate major success in their decades-long environmental campaign

(Pematangsiantar/Wuppertal, January 27, 2026) On January 20, 2026, the Indonesian government revoked the operating licenses of a total of 28 companies on the island of Sumatra, including that of the pulp company PT Toba Pulp Lestari (TPL). The decision is seen as an important step toward curbing the ongoing ecological crises in the region and as a success for the decades-long environmental commitment of the churches in North Sumatra.

Increasing number of environmental disasters in Sumatra

Sumatra has been affected by severe environmental disasters for years, including floods, landslides, and forest fires, which have led to the loss of livelihoods for the indigenous populations living there. The government's decision is a necessary response to these escalating crises, which are directly linked to deforestation, industrial forestry, raw material exploitation, and inadequate protection of natural resources.

Ephorus Dr. Victor Tinambunan, head of Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP), Indonesia's largest Protestant church, expressed his gratitude to President Prabowo Subianto in his statement on January 20, 2026. The measure sends a clear signal that economic development and environmental justice are inseparable.

Persistent resistance rewarded

The revocation of PT Toba Pulp Lestari's operating license was preceded by a joint initiative launched in 2000 by the member churches of the United Evangelical Mission (UEM) in North Sumatra. It was supported by close cooperation with the Catholic Church, broad interfaith engagement, indigenous communities, civil society organizations, and the media.

Affected communities, pastors, and church members were subjected to intimidation, criminalization, and considerable social pressure for years. Irma Simanjuntak, advocacy advisor for the UEM in the Asia region, emphasizes: "This decision offers the chance for a real turning point toward a future characterized by justice, sustainability, and responsibility for creation."

Together with other churches, our interfaith partners, indigenous communities, and civil society, we will closely monitor the implementation of this government decision and advocate for ecological restoration, social justice, and responsible policies."

About „UEM“

The United Evangelical Mission (UEM) with offices in Germany, Indonesia and Tanzania is an international, equal communion of 39 members, including 32 Protestant churches in Africa and Asia as well as six Protestant churches and the v. Bodelschwingh Foundations Bethel in Germany. The UEM consistently pursues a holistic understanding of mission. This includes improving the living conditions of suffering and disadvantaged people while respecting their personal dignity and taking their cultural context into account.